

Mount Vernon Circle Environmental Assessment

January 8, 2003



Public Workshop

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), in cooperation with the National Park Service (NPS), is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) for providing additional parking, and enhancing safety for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists in the area of the existing Mount Vernon Circle at the south terminus of George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP). A public workshop has been scheduled to gather citizen input regarding the parking and trail alternatives. The workshop will be held Tuesday, January 21, 2003, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., at Walt Whitman Middle School in Alexandria, Virginia.

There will be a short presentation at 7:00 p.m., which will provide an overview of the project and present the parking and trail alternatives. Although there will be no



formal public statement opportunities at the workshop, forms for written comments will be provided to attendees and representatives of the NPS, and FHWA will be available to discuss the project with interested citizens.

Purpose and Need

The Purpose and Need statement serves as the first chapter in the EA. It explains the need for the study and action, and addresses the purpose, goals, and objectives of the proposed project.

The purpose of this project is to provide improvements (including parking, roadway, sidewalks, and bike trails) to accommodate current and planned demand for parking, improve traffic operations, and to enhance the safety of pedestrians, motorists, and cyclists in the vicinity of Mount Vernon Estates and Gardens.

Project need is based on several cumulative factors.

- Analysis of existing conditions shows that a deficiency currently exists for parking during periods of peak visitation.
- At certain times, pedestrians must cross congested roads to access Mount Vernon from the existing parking areas.
- Recent and planned expansion and renovations to the Mount Vernon Estates and Gardens will lead to changes in visitor and pedestrian patterns, including increases in parking demand.



Goals and objectives for the project include:

- Increase parking capacity for visitors to Mount Vernon.
- Improve pedestrian and bike trail connectivity in the immediate area of Mount Vernon Estates and Gardens.
- Enhance pedestrian, motorist, and cyclist safety.
- Coordinate with other studies and agencies (including Fairfax County and Virginia Department of Transportation).
- Provide extensive opportunities for public involvement.
- Coordinate with National Park Service management plans for the GWMP.

Existing Conditions

The study team has completed an *Existing Conditions Report*, which summarizes existing traffic and environmental conditions within the study area, and also documents current environmental and cultural resources, land use, and socioeconomic factors. The report was provided to local agencies. A Stakeholder Participation Panel (SPP) was formed at the start of the study period, March 2002, to assist FHWA and NPS to complete the study. The SPP is a group of citizens representing various communities in the vicinity of Mount Vernon. SPP members were appointed by Mt. Vernon District Supervisor Gerry Hyland. The impact on existing conditions and on stakeholders was analyzed for each suggested alternative.

Preliminary Concepts

The following preliminary concepts were first presented at a public meeting on June 26, 2002:

- New parking lots on NPS property between Route 235 and GWMP and on Mount Vernon property between two segments of Route 235
- Reconfiguration and expansion of existing lots
- Shuttle bus from Fort Hunt Park
- Off-site bus parking

Attendees responded to questions on comment forms. Responses indicated parking as the most important issue, best addressed by parking and traffic solutions. Any realignment of Mt. Vernon Highway to improve traffic operations and enhance safety was opposed by citizens. Based on comments from the public meeting and further discussion with citizens and the National Park Service, fourteen alternatives were initially developed. These alternatives will be briefly reviewed at the public meeting. At this time, it is recommended that the following four alternatives be carried forward and analyzed in more detail. The other ten alternatives were considered but are not recommended for further consideration due to various factors, for example not meeting the project purpose and need.

Alternative 1



Construct a new parking lot on Mount Vernon property west of Route 235. This alternative provides one new parking lot with 290 spaces on Mount Vernon property between Route 235 (north) and Route 235 (west). It has a footprint of 2.7 acres, and has one driveway onto Route 235 (north) and one driveway at the existing east access point onto Route 235 (west). It is approximately 900 feet from the lot to the entrance gate, and pedestrians would be required to cross Route 235 to reach the gate from the new lot.

Alternative 2



Expand East and West Parking Lots; construct a new overflow parking lot on Mount Vernon property west of Route 235. This alternative would include an additional 130 spaces in the West Lot and an additional 30 spaces in the East Lot. There also would be a 130-space overflow lot that would be constructed on Mount Vernon property between Route 235 (north) and Route 235 (west). The spaces in the expanded current lots would be accessed through existing driveways. The overflow lot has one driveway onto Route 235 (north) and one driveway at the existing access point from the Route 235. The total parking and access area for the proposed parking spaces is 3.0 acres. Pedestrians using the West and East lots would continue to access the entrance gate using existing walkways, while visitors parking in the overflow lot would walk a distance of approximately 1,000 feet before crossing Route 235.

Alternative 3



Expand East and West Parking Lots; expand the existing employee parking lot on Mount Vernon property behind the wall south of Route 235 to accommodate overflow parking.

This alternative would expand the West Lot and the East Lot as in Alternative 3. The existing employee lot behind the Mount Vernon wall, south of Route 235, also would be expanded to the west to provide 130 spaces for overflow parking. Currently, there are greenhouses immediately to the west of the employee parking lot. The expansions of the West and East lots require an area of 1.1 acres on wooded land, and the expansion of the employee lot would use an area of 1.4 acres on developed land. Pedestrians walking from the overflow lot would walk behind the wall to the entrance gate, a distance of approximately 1,100 feet. This lot would require additional measures by Mount Vernon to route visitors through the ticket gate.

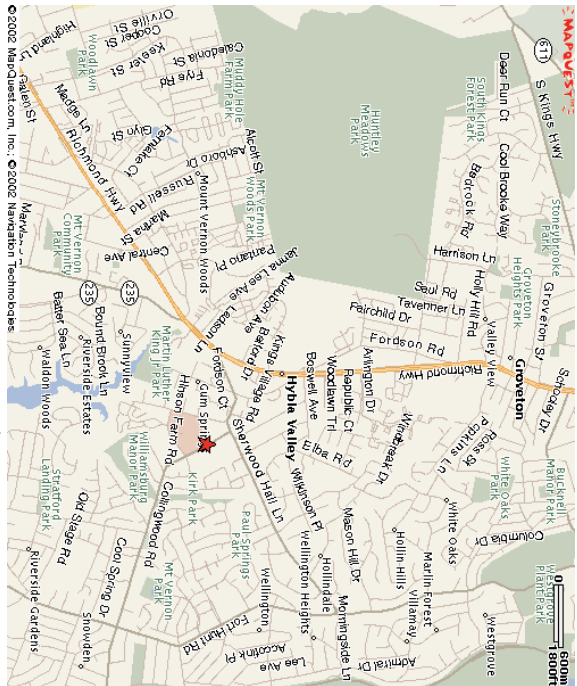
Alternative 4



"No-build" Alternative. This alternative would not provide any additional parking spaces or safety enhancement. The Potomac National Heritage and Scenic Trail would remain in its current configuration.

Public Involvement

The SPP is composed of citizens who represent the interests of the community near Mount Vernon. These citizens were appointed by Fairfax County Supervisor Gerry Hyland, who also sits on the panel. Regular meetings have been held between the FHWA and NPS, the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, and the SPP to discuss the project and alternatives, and to receive feedback and guidance from these groups. The general public is involved through workshops and written comments. At the January 21 workshop, citizens will have the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and concerns with representatives from the FHWA, NPS, VDOT, and Fairfax County.



PUBLIC WORKSHOP

When: <i>Tuesday, January 21, 2003</i> <i>6:00 PM to 8:00 PM</i>	Where: <i>Walt Whitman Middle School</i> <i>2500 Parkers Lane</i> <i>Alexandria, VA 22306</i>
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Comments about the study can also be directed to:

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